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In the first of what are likely to be a series of budget battles this year, lawmakers may not pass a spending bill to keep the federal government open past midnight tonight.

The White House and Congressional leaders are trying to break a budget deadlock and prevent a federal government shutdown that would idle hundreds of thousands of workers.

President Obama and congressional leaders failed to reach a deal in late-night talks Thursday on government funding for the rest of the fiscal year that ends Sept. 30.

Republicans and Democrats say they don't want the government shut down. But if it does, members of both parties are already airing their arguments for why the other party deserves the blame.

"We have offered repeatedly legislation and passed it in the House to keep the government open and to cut spending to put us on a path to fiscal responsibility," said Republican Rep. John Kline.

Kline and his fellow Republicans blame House Democrats for failing to pass a budget last year when Democrats controlled the House.

They're also directing criticism at the Democratic-controlled Senate for not agreeing to the Republicans' bill to cut \$61 billion from this fiscal year's budget.

In an email, a spokesman for Republican Rep. Erik Paulsen wrote that Paulsen is, "extremely disappointed that the Senate hasn't put forth a plan of its own and encourages them to act to prevent a shutdown."

Democrats responded that Republicans haven't been negotiating in good faith.

"Unfortunately, this era of tea party politics rejects compromise regardless of the harsh and harmful consequences," said DFL Rep. Betty McCollum in a statement. "President Obama has already met tea party Republicans more than halfway by offering \$33 billion in cuts to the rest of Fiscal Year 2011. "

McCollum and other Democrats also question whether Republicans are sincere in their desire to cut government spending, since one of the apparent sticking points in the negotiations are so-called policy riders that would affect abortion and environmental policy.

Middle ground may be hard to find as tea party supporters, who helped Republicans capture their House majority, keep the pressure on the party's right flank.

At a tea party rally held in front of the Capitol this week, protesters could be seen carrying signs reading, "Shut it down" and chanted that slogan minutes before Rep. Michele Bachmann spoke to the crowd of about 400 or 500 people.

Bachmann has said repeatedly that she doesn't want a government shutdown - which she's renamed a "slow down" because many federal workers would actually continue to work even if their paychecks are delayed.

But Bachmann also voted against a House measure yesterday that would fund the government for another week and the military through the end of the fiscal year in September.

Although that measure passed, a provision restricting abortion in the District of Columbia means the Senate will not take up the bill.

In a statement, Bachmann said she voted against the funding bill because it does not remove funding for President Obama's health care overhaul that passed last year that she and the Republicans oppose.

But if removing health care funding is Bachmann's condition for supporting a spending bill, it's highly unlikely that there's any spending bill Bachmann would vote for that can also get the President's signature.

Both parties are presenting their stance as reasonable. In an email, a spokeswoman for DFL Rep. Tim Walz wrote that Walz, "still believes that compromise is a virtue not a vice and that southern Minnesotans want the parties to be able to come together and find solutions."

Meanwhile, as the midnight deadline draws near, congressional staffers remain in the dark over who will continue to work through a deadline and who will be furloughed. Staffers' precious BlackBerries may have to be turned off until a spending deal is reached.

In addition to members' staffs, thousands of workers who maintain the Capitol complex would also have to stay home, including the elevator operators in the Senate.